

On the last day of April, this year, we met the man who made a singular contribution to Canadian journalism twenty-nine years ago in Winnipeg. Short-lived as that achievement was it has served as a model that may be re-created in the not-too-distant future. The man was Harry Ferns, who with Harry and Jean Crowe and others, founded the Winnipeg Citizen, a full-sized daily paper that lasted from March 1, 1948, until April 13, 1949. Its singularity is that it was Canada's first co-operatively owned daily paper. (Ferns was then teaching at United College, Winnipeg, and is now a professor at the University of Birmingham).

The committee to create The Citizen may have originated in a simple question asked by a printer, Leonard Orchard, in an economics class at the Workers' Educational Association. It was a few days after printers had been locked out of the Winnipeg Free Press and the Tribune, November 8, 1945. Orchard asked his instructor, H.S. Ferns, if it would be possible to establish a newspaper which would be subject to democratic control.

Thus, on April 15, 1946, The Winnipeg Citizen Co-operative Publishing Co. Ltd., came into existence on the basis of five dollar memberships, \$50 loan units, one man-one vote, and community control by district elected delegates (one for every 200 members.)

To make a long story short \$150,000 was raised, the paper went to press and a thousand problems struck. Newsprint was hard to get as it was rationed, the Canadian Press news service franchise was not forthcoming and working capital was only \$35,000 after starting-up costs were met. On top of that, there was ideological in-fighting.

Perhaps the bitterest pill was the comment of Ernest Constable, secretary of the ITU's Citizen chapel, who wrote in the last issue of the Citizen:

"Out of 45,000 trade union members in Greater Winnipeg not more than one-tenth subscribed to the Citizen but continued to purchase the daily papers which they said 'misrepresented' them."

For all that, the paper attained 30,000 circulation and pointed the way to democratic control of media.

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